

## Rep. Ross Hunter

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## 2014 SESSION REPORT

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## Contact Me

I love to hear from you about your issues, suggestions, or concerns. We can solve a lot of problems for people, direct you to resources, etc. During the time between legislative sessions, my assistant Marilyn Pedersen and I have an office in Bellevue and it's best to contact us there.

I maintain a web site at [www.rosshunter.info](http://www.rosshunter.info) which you can bookmark through the code below.

You can sign up for regular updates there, or join my Facebook network.



Rep. Bruce Chandler and I spoke with TVW on the budget outlook on opening day

## News From the Legislature

# State Representative Ross Hunter

48th  
Legislative  
District



## 2014 Session Report

Dear Neighbors,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent you in Olympia. It's an honor and a privilege.

A short summary of this session is that it was disappointing. We didn't solve a number of key problems:

- No transportation package. I am now worried that we might lose traction on completing the 520 bridge and have to start over with the permitting process, a crazy disaster. The Senate seems to be high-centered.
- No capital budget. For the first time in 18 years we don't have a capital budget to build schools, fix broken culverts, etc. The House passed a bipartisan version of this with over 90% voting yes, but the Senate didn't pass one at all.
- We did not fix something about teacher and principal evaluations that will result in Washington losing \$40 million a year in Title I money from the federal government that goes to low-income schools. Both chambers failed to move bills on this. I am very disappointed both chambers failed to move bills on this

We did complete an operating budget, but it doesn't make significant progress on addressing the McCleary issue, something the Supreme Court castigated us about in January.

Throughout this newsletter you'll see QR codes like the one below. Scan these codes with your smartphone or tablet for a video message from me on these topics.

I'm now back at my district office in Bellevue. Please call, write, or stop by anytime.

Sincerely,

Rep. Ross Hunter



Scan the QR code above for a brief video message

### Keeping in touch

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## Budget Update



*I chair the House Appropriations Committee, which is responsible for writing the state budget.*

### A budget must meet three constraints:

1. It must balance in the current biennium.
2. It must meet the "expenditure limit" introduced in initiative 601.
3. It must show a positive balance in 2015-17 under the rules established in the 4-year balanced budget bill from two years ago.

Of these, the third constraint is the most difficult. The House and Senate had very different approaches to the problem.

The Senate proposed a number of spending cuts that make little sense to me. For example, in many agencies worker's compensation rates changed. When the rate went down the Senate took the savings, but when the rate went up, they didn't fund the increase. If a business did this they would be in court. If you are going to propose cutting something you should point at it and be honest about what gets cut.

The Senate also proposed about \$83 million in new tax exemptions. These don't start until next year, a common budget-writing strategy to hide the true cost of an item, and are paid for in the next biennium with a shift from a different account, resulting in cuts there. This would leave us with a long-term reduction of about \$160 million per biennium and no revenue to pay for it. I do not think we should reduce taxes when we have the McCleary problem to deal with in the next biennium.

The House proposed closing some tax loopholes and extending a fee that is scheduled to sunset at the end of this biennium in order to fund the reinstatement of the Initiative 732 COLA for teachers and other school employees, plus an investment in improving the quality of our early learning system. The Senate didn't like this.



### Outside these fundamental differences:

- Both chambers proposed increases in K-12 spending to comply with the McCleary decision.
- Both budgets funded increases in mental health funding, a critical need in Washington.
- Both budgets fund the "TR Settlement" - the result of a court case showing that we don't provide adequate mental health care to children. This is about \$8 million, and will grow to \$35 million a year over the next five years.

The biggest potential problem we face with this budget is responding to the Supreme Court on the McCleary decision. To try to clear up confusion about the "plan" for increasing education funding Rep. Pat Sullivan and I introduced HB 2792. The bill lays out the schedule for McCleary funding proposed by the Joint Task Force on Education Funding in 2012, a task force report the court has mentioned several times. As expected, the bill did not pass, but is a reasonable structure for next year.

The final budget drops all the tax increases, all the new tax loop-hole creation, the teacher COLA and the fee extension the House proposed.

Short sessions (every other year) are 60 days long and are designed to fix problems that have come up between the two longer sessions. This is the first time since the start of the recession when we do not have major changes in the budget. I described the final product in the press as a "modest" budget. This is perhaps charitable.

### The final product includes:

- \$58 million investment in K-12 books, supplies and technology, part of our McCleary obligation.
- Significant steps on mental health beds in the community.
- 5,000 new slots for services to our developmentally disabled community, taking a big bite out of the "no paid services" waitlist.

I'm OK with it, but it puts off big issues to next year. Parts of Washington's budget are inadequate.

We've lost in court on children's mental health, we are 49th in the country in community mental health beds, we are being required by the court to substantially increase funding for K-12, and our higher education system needs significant capacity increases to keep up with today's economy. What's up with all this? This didn't used to be a problem. What happened?

We've turned into a low-tax state. **Scan the QR code** below to hear me explain this in greater detail.



## Transportation Update

There hasn't been any significant negotiation on transportation this session – the Senate seems to be high-centered. The Republican chairman (Sen. Curtis King, R-Yakima) came out with a proposal last month that he claims to have 13 votes for. The last time I checked you need 25 votes to pass a bill in the Senate, so he's a little short.

### I am very frustrated about the situation. My concerns are:

- SR 520 needs to be finished.
- King County's transit needs are crucial – we are facing a 16% cut in service, a cut that will dramatically affect the Eastside. Imagine all those people back in their cars.
- I-405 is perpetually clogged.
- SR-167 and 509 are crucial to the growth of the manufacturing and warehousing base in Seattle and the South King County area.
- Other parts of the state need transportation solutions too, both transit and road/bridge construction.
- Our maintenance needs on our existing base of highways has been neglected and needs renewal.



*Transit needs are crucial*

In the end the Senate did not bring a proposal up for a vote. **Scan the QR code** below for more of my take on why transportation talks are stalling in the Senate.



## Interesting Legislation

I receive lots of email about particular bills. Below I've tried to address the ones that come up most often in emails from constituents.

**DREAM Act** - This bill allows children to get state need grants for college even if they were brought to the U.S. illegally by their parents. I voted yes. It passed with solid bipartisan margins in both chambers and was signed by Governor Inslee. The speech by my budget counterpart in the House Bruce Chandler (R-Granger) was particularly powerful.

**High School: 24 credits** - This is a well thought-through proposal to modernize our graduation requirements to match them up with today's job markets and college entrance requirements. A bill implementing it came out of the Senate with only four "no" votes. A slightly modified version of the bill passed on the last day of the session.

**Teacher/Principal Evaluation Program (TPEP)** - A few years ago we passed legislation modernizing our teacher/principal evaluation system, including student learning results for the first time. I supported the bill at the time, and support the change being proposed, one that would require the use of test score data rather than allow it, mostly because the change is required by the federal government and without it we will lose up to \$40 million a year in money that's currently spent on interventions for students who need extra help. The bill to change this failed in the Senate. Very dramatic – bills rarely come up for a vote here if the sponsors don't think they have the votes to pass. A new bill was introduced in the House (HB 2800) that I supported but it also didn't pass.

**Pay it Forward** - An interesting idea that advances students the cost of a college education and extracts it later with a percentage of their income instead of crippling debt payments. For some serious financial reasons I am not a big fan of this idea and didn't advance the bill out of committee.

**Big Oil Loophole** - I support closing a tax loophole that allows refineries in Washington to not pay tax on fuel they use internally at their facility, an exemption created a very long time ago for the pulp industry. Now 99% of the use is in the oil industry. The Senate refused to consider this.

**Outlawing Gay Conversion Therapy** – This heinous practice tries to "convert" gays and lesbians to become straight, often causing irreparable harm. The House passed a bill (94-4) outlawing this practice with children. There was significant Republican support, with almost the entire body voting yes on the bill. Disappointingly the Senate Health-care committee killed the bill.

For more on the interesting bills we passed this session like the Tesla bill, retirement savings, sick leave, and minimum wage, **scan the QR code** below.

